

# The ABCs of selling

By Harvey Mackay

Not long ago, I was listening as one of my grandchildren practiced his ABCs. He had a little picture book that helped him remember what the letters stood for, and he studied it intently, determined to be the first in his class to know all the letters and words. With his determination, I knew he would master the alphabet in no time at all.

As he worked, I started thinking about what those letters mean to me, after a lifetime in sales and years of helping young hopefuls get started in their careers. I didn't draw pictures, but these are the words my alphabet book would include:

**A**vailability for your customers is essential, so they can reach you with questions, concerns or reorders.

**B**elieve in yourself and your company, or find something else to sell.

**C**ustomers aren't always right, but if you want to keep them as your customers, find a way to make them right.

**D**eliver more than you promise.

**E**ducation is for life – never stop learning.

**F**ollow up and follow through. Never leave a customer hanging.

**G**oals give you a reason to go to work every day. When you reach your goals, set higher ones!

**H**umanize your selling strategy by learning everything you can about your customers.

**I**s the least important letter in selling.

**J**oin trade organizations and community groups that will help you both professionally and personally, such as Toastmasters, chamber of commerce or Junior Achievement.

**K**now your competitors and their products as well as you know your own.

**L**isten to your customers or they'll start talking to someone else.

**M**aybe is the worst answer a customer can give. No is better than maybe. Find out what you can do to turn it into a yes.

**N**etworking is among the most important skills a salesperson can develop. Someone you know knows someone you need to know.

**O**pportunities are everywhere. Keep your antennae up.

**P**rice is not the only reason customers buy your product, but it's a good reason.

**Q**uality can never be sacrificed if you want to keep your customers satisfied.

**R**elationships are precious: They take time to develop and are worth every minute you invest in them.

**S**ervice is spelled "serve us" in companies that want to stay in business for a long time.

**T**rust is central to doing business with anyone. Without it, you have another word that begins with T: Trouble.

**U**nlimited potential is possible whether you sell computers or candy. You are the only one who can limit your potential.

**V**olunteer: It's always good to give back. You'll probably find that you get more than you give, and there is no shortage of organizations that need your help.

**W**inning doesn't necessarily mean beating everyone else. A win-win situation is the best of both worlds.

**X**-ray and catscan your customers so that you know everything about them – so you can serve them better.

**Y**ou is a word your customers need to hear often, as in “What can I do for you?”

**Z**eal is a critical element in your presentations, service and life in general. Let your enthusiasm shine through!

Some things never change – including the importance of knowing how to treat your customers and what really matters in your relationships. And as you can see, most of these items cover far more than just sales.

Someday, I think my grandchildren will still be able to use my little alphabet book. Nothing would make me prouder.

***Mackay's Moral:*** Now you know my ABCs – sales skills from A to Z.

# Negotiating 101: 40 years of experience

By Harvey Mackay

If you ask me what one skill has made the biggest difference in my career, I would answer you, hands down, negotiating. It applies to selling, purchasing, hiring, firing, expanding, downsizing, and every other phase of business you can name. It's part of the game that I am particularly fond of, and it's not just to see how much I can get the other person to give. I like to learn from the varied strategies that other people use.

Here are some of the lessons I have learned over a lifetime:

1. You can't negotiate anything unless you absolutely know the market. Only then you will be able to recognize a good deal when you see it.
2. If you can't say yes, it's no. Don't sugarcoat it. Don't talk yourself into yes just to seem like a nice guy. No one ever went broke because he or she said "NO" too often.
3. The single biggest tool in any negotiation is the willingness to get up and walk away from the table without a deal.
4. Always, always, before you begin any negotiation, look beyond the title and make sure that the person you're dealing with is in a position of authority to sign off on the agreement. If not, don't deal until you can negotiate with someone who is.
5. It's not how much it's worth! It's how much people think it's worth.
6. Many people listen ... very few actually hear. You can't learn anything if you are doing all the talking.
7. In any negotiation, the given reason is seldom the real reason. Find out the real reason and your probability of success goes up dramatically.
8. No one ever choked to death swallowing "his" or "her" own pride.
9. In the long run, instincts are no match for information.
10. There's no more certain recipe for disaster than a decision based on emotion. Or another way of saying this is: Make decisions with your heart and you'll end up with heart disease.
11. A dream is always a bargain no matter what you pay for it. If it's something you've always wanted, and this is your big chance to get it, go for it and make it work.
12. The most important term in any contract isn't "in" the contract. It's dealing with people who are honest. As the old adage goes: You lie down with dogs ... and you get up with fleas. Rotten wood cannot be carved.

13. There is no such thing as a “final offer.”
14. Try to let the other person speak first.
15. Never give an ultimatum unless you mean it.
16. You cannot get dealt in with a straight flush unless you are in the game.
17. Smile and say no, no, no, no, no ... until your tongue bleeds.
18. Agreements prevent disagreements. You have to fight your guts out for an agreement and then you won't have a disagreement.
19. If you can afford to buy your way out of a problem, you don't have a problem.
20. More deals result from whom you know than what you know. And it's not just whom you know but how you get to know them.
21. The walls have ears. Don't discuss any business where others can overhear it. Almost as many deals have gone down in elevators as elevators have gone down.
22. People don't plan to fail, they fail to plan. Top negotiators debrief themselves. They keep a book on themselves and their opponents. You never know when that information may be gold.
23. Your day usually goes the way the corners of your mouth turn. Your attitude determines your altitude.
24. People go around all their lives saying: What should I buy? What should I sell? Wrong question: When should I buy? When should I sell? Timing is everything.

***Mackay's Moral:*** 25. *When a person with money meets a person with experience, the person with the experience ends up with the money and the person with the money ends up with the experience.*

# There's no place in business for these 4-letter words

By Harvey Mackay

There are certain four-letter words that have no business in business. Many, in fact, are bad for business -- so bad that using them may determine whether you stay in business.

No, we're not really talking about profanity here; that's a given. These are everyday words that really smart people eliminated from their vocabularies long ago. Let me share some of the most offensive. I've even used them in sentences so that you can avoid these common mistakes.

**Can't**, as in "We can't do that" or "You can't expect us to meet that deadline." Your customers come to you because they think you can do what they ask. If you truly cannot produce what they're asking for, be honest but then help them find someone who can, even if it's your competition. They'll remember that you went the extra mile to make them happy.

**Busy**: "I'm too busy to do that now" or "I'll call you when I'm not so busy." The last thing your customers want to know is that they rank at the bottom of the food chain. It is acceptable to say that you will need a few days to do the job right, or that you'll knock off a few bucks in exchange for their patience. It is never okay to imply that they aren't as important as all your other customers.

**Bore**: "This project is such a bore" or "Don't bore me with the details." Unemployment is boring. Try to find something to love about every job or project you do. Otherwise, find a job you love. Life is too short to be bored or boring.

**Same**: "We've done it the same way for years" or "Same old, same old." If you've been doing something the same way for years, it's a good sign you're doing it the wrong way. Maybe it's time to find a new and better way to do it. People change. Technologies change. Your customers aren't asking you to dye your hair purple and wear your kid's jeans. But their businesses change and they're looking to you to follow (or lead). You should question why you're still doing things the same way.

**Safe**: "Let's play it safe." Safe is important in baseball, but in business you must be prepared to take some risks. The scary part about taking risks is that they don't always work, but I'll take a good calculated risk any day of the week over the boring, same, safe way. Sometimes it's risky not to take a risk. To triple your success ratio, sometimes you have to triple your failure ratio.

**Rude**: No sentence example needed here. There is never, ever, ever an excuse to be rude to a coworker, customer, or a stranger on the street. You're staking your name on your behavior, and you don't want your name to become a four-letter word.

**Mean**: Your lawyer should be mean. Your tennis serve might be mean. You can't afford to be mean. You are dealing with customers whose business and referrals will determine

where your kids go to college and what kind of retirement you can look forward to. If that doesn't make you nice, I don't know what will.

**Isn't:** "That isn't my job." Maybe your job description doesn't include every last chore that's required to finish a project, but someone has to do those things. You need to take your turn. Along the way, you just might find yourself becoming invaluable for your diverse job skills or your particular expertise. Never pass up the chance to do something new, just because you think you're too good. The further you climb up the ladder, the further down you can fall. It's important to have secure footing on each rung.

**Fear:** "I fear that we may be moving too fast" or "My biggest fear is that we can't do this" only demonstrate one fact: you haven't done your homework. Common sense, thorough research, and sound advice should allay your fears to a reasonable level. Knowing what is acceptable risk should help too. If your biggest fear is that rain will ruin an outdoor promotion, plan something inside. If you fear your suppliers will keep you from meeting a production deadline, find a more reliable supplier. Take charge.

**Last:** "Nice guys finish last." I consider myself a nice guy, and I hate to finish last. But I've had to lose a few times in order to win the next round. I've learned something from every last-place finish.

***Mackay's Moral:*** *Sticks and stones can break your bones, but these four-letter words will hurt your business.*

765 words

# What makes a good sales rep?

By Harvey Mackay

I've been a salesman all my life, and I've been hiring sales reps for nearly as long. So I think I know a thing or two about sales. Recently a friend asked me to identify the traits of a sales superstar. Here's my recipe:

- ❑ **Hungry fighter.** If I had to name only three traits that make a great sales representative, they would be: 1) hungry fighter, 2) hungry fighter and 3) hungry fighter. That's how much I think of this trait. Every good salesperson I've ever encountered is driven. They have a strong work ethic and a high energy level. They work harder and longer than their peers. When the economy is poor, they are still out there pounding the pavement or making calls.
- ❑ **Tell the truth.** I've always believed that telling the truth is the best policy. In business, especially today, it's a must. A few years back, the Forum Corporation of Boston, Mass., studied 341 salespeople from 11 different companies in five different industries. Their purpose was to determine what separated the top producers from the average producers. When the study was finished, the results were startling. It was not skill, knowledge or charisma that divided the pack. The difference came down to one trait: honesty. When customers trust salespeople, they buy from them!
- ❑ **Positive attitude.** Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude. 90 percent of success is mental. You can alter your life by altering your mind. In tough economies like today, it may not be your fault for being down, but it is certainly your fault for not getting up. You have to be a believer to be an achiever.
- ❑ **Know your product.** Strong sales reps know their products backward and forward. They also know their competitors' products and are prepared to point out the differences.
- ❑ **Be prepared.** I still remember my old Boy Scout motto: "Be prepared." Well, it's true. It takes a lot of unspectacular preparation to produce spectacular results.
- ❑ **Reputation.** You can't buy a good reputation ... you must earn it. If you don't have a positive reputation, it will be difficult to be successful in whatever you do.
- ❑ **Likeability.** I have never known anyone to buy from someone they don't like. Are you genuine? Pleasant? Easy to talk with?

- ❑ **Good first impression.** You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. Are you neat and well groomed? Underdressed or overdressed?
- ❑ **Set goals** . . . measurable, identifiable, obtainable, specific and in writing. Winners set goals; losers make excuses. Remember the Italian proverb: “You never climb higher than the ladder you select.” Goals give you more than a reason to get up in the morning; they are an incentive to keep you going all day. Most important, goals need to be realistic: beyond your grasp but within your reach and in the foreseeable future.
- ❑ **Service mentality.** I’ve often said the sale begins when the customer says yes. Good salespeople make sure the job gets done on time – and done right. There’s one thing no business has enough of: customers. Take care of the customers you’ve got, and they’ll take care of you. You must have a fanatical attention to detail!
- ❑ **Great listener.** You can’t learn anything with your mouth open. For many people, good listening means, “I talk, you listen.” Listening is a two-way process. Yes, you need to be heard. You also need to hear the other person’s ideas, questions and objections. If you talk at people instead of with them, they’re not buying in – they’re caving in. Believe it or not, being a good listener is more important in sales than being a good talker.
- ❑ **Sense of humor.** It is impossible to underrate the importance of a sense of humor. When there are inevitable setbacks along the way, try some humor and laugh about them.
- ❑ **Thirst for self-improvement.** You don’t go to school once for a lifetime. You are in school all your life. Good salespeople are constantly working to become better. They take courses, read books, listen to audiotapes and inhale everything they can to improve. We live in the information age so it’s easy to take every opportunity to learn and grow at any hour of the day. Remember, the largest room in the world is the room for improvement.

***Mackay’s Moral:** A salesperson tells, a good salesperson explains, and a great salesperson demonstrates.*

# We learn more by listening than talking

By Harvey Mackay

We spend 45 percent of our waking time listening, yet we forget 50 percent of what we hear.

Listening is a critical skill in everyone's life. Remember the old game of "telephone," where the first person in line whispers a message to the next person, and it gets passed down the line? This usually results in a completely different message or statement. Many of us played that game as children, sometimes with hilarious results. In real life, if you're not a good, careful listener, the results can be less than amusing – even damaging or life changing.

Hearing is one of the body's five senses, but listening is an art. Being a good listener can make or break a career. Your success could hinge on whether you have mastered the skill of listening.

Believe it or not, there's an International Listening Association website which offers some interesting facts:

- 85 percent of our learning is derived from listening.
- Listeners are distracted, forgetful and preoccupied 75 percent of the time.
- Most people only remember about 20 percent of what they hear over time. But I would advise here that trying to commit the important things to memory should be accompanied by some efficient note-taking.
- People listen at about 125 to 250 words per minute, but think at about 1,000 to 3,000 words per minute.
- There have been at least 35 business studies indicating listening is a top skill needed for success. Frankly, I think the experts can agree that another study will not produce any different results. Now it's time for teaching effective listening skills to those who don't already possess them.

Television and radio have enhanced the importance of listening. Instead of having the facts before you in print, as with newspapers, magazines and the internet, you need to be able to process what you are hearing. In the business world, reports and memos take the place of the print media, while the spoken messages in meetings test your listening skills. It's no wonder that for people with poor listening skills, meetings are perceived as punishment rather than an opportunity for good give and take.

Bill Marriott, chairman and CEO of Marriott International, the world's largest hotel chain described “the biggest lesson I have learned though the years.”

“It is to listen to your people. I find that if you have senior managers who really gather their people around them, get their ideas and listen to their input, you make a lot better decisions.”

Marriott said he learned this lesson from a visit with President Dwight Eisenhower when Marriott was a young ensign in the Navy. He had been in the Navy for six months, and the president was a visitor at Marriott’s home at Christmastime. It was extremely cold outside but his father had put up targets outside for shooting and asked the president if he wanted to go outside and shoot or stay inside by the fire.

“He just turned to me,” said Marriott, “and said, ‘What do you think, ensign?’”

Marriott said he told the president it was too cold outside for shooting and to stay by the fire, which they did.

To this day, Marriott says, that lesson (asking someone else's opinion) has stayed with him and has been a big asset in his business.

Remember, most people won’t listen to what you’re saying unless they already feel that you have listened to them. People who feel like they’re being listened to will feel accepted and appreciated rather than isolated and rejected. When we feel we are being listened to, it makes us feel like we are being taken seriously and what we say really matters.

So if you want to be listened to, avoid these anti-listening gaffes:

- Interrupting.
- Avoiding eye contact
- Rushing the speaker
- Letting your attention wander.
- Rushing ahead and finishing the speaker’s thoughts.
- Not responding when appropriate.
- Use of negating phrases such as “yes, but ...”
- Trying to top the speaker’s story.
- Forgetting what the speaker has already told you.

***Mackay’s Moral:*** *You can win more friends with your ears than with your mouth.*

# 10 Commandments for the office

By Harvey Mackay

It's just business as usual, day in and day out. The fast lane gets faster. Competition for business and jobs gets meaner. The world gets smaller every day. You've dealt with a hundred co-workers, customers, vendors, and the irritating kid who works at the lunch counter. It's time to go home and unwind.

The traffic jam gives you an opportunity to replay some of the day's encounters. Regrettably, you wish you would have handled a few things quite differently. How can you make tomorrow better?

My mother always told me, "You don't have to like everybody, but you do need to learn to get along."

Over the years, I've developed a list, a "Ten Commandments for the Office," which makes my commute home a little less guilt-ridden. Better yet, it's improved my commute to the office. If I follow my own advice, I won't have to spend my time apologizing for what I should have done in the first place. Try it out.

1. **Be respectful.** This includes respect for other people's property, ideas and time. Frankly, this commandment should about cover everything. If you are respectful of others, you can usually work out most issues – even if it's agreeing to disagree. An added bonus is that when you treat others with respect, they are more inclined to return the favor.
2. **Follow through.** If you promise to do something, do it. No ifs, buts or maybes. No excuses, no whining. You are only as good as your word. There will always be a place in this world for the person who says, "I'll take care of it." And then does it.
3. **Think before you speak.** Don't say whatever is on your mind, unless you want your mindless thoughts to come back to haunt you. Those ghosts can rise up years later, just when that promotion looks so promising. And while we're on the topic, remember that how you say something is as important as what you say.
4. **Help out.** So what if it's not in your job description. If you have an opportunity to be useful, jump at it. Even if the rewards are not in the form of a paycheck, your co-workers will remember who helped them when they needed it. Taking on a little extra work – or a lot – shows that you are a team player, an employee worth watching.

5. **Learn something new every day.** It could be a new skill. Maybe the latest developments in your industry. Or just the name of a person you see daily at the copy machine. You have millions of brain cells just waiting to work for you!
6. **Pay attention.** If you go directly to your cubicle and barricade yourself all day, you're missing important developments in your workplace. Not the gossipy events, of course, but the really good stuff – new procedures, new ideas and so on. This commandment also covers those occasions when the value of your input depends on your familiarity with the situation at hand. In short, always keep your antennae up!
7. **Ignore pettiness.** Rise above it, or you will be dragged down with it. There will always be someone who will make a mountain out of a molehill. It better not be you.
8. **Be patient.** Not to be confused with tolerating incompetence, this commandment covers a multitude of situations. Someone misunderstood you. A job is taking longer than you planned. You are missing every traffic light. What will you gain by losing your cool? I'm not a patient guy by nature, so I've really had to work at this one. If I can do it, you can too!
9. **A good attitude is up to you.** It takes a lot for the world to come to an end, so don't act like it's happening every day. Be encouraging, be cheerful. Refuse to be brought down by minor – or major – setbacks. Bad attitudes are contagious. The good news is that positive attitudes are catching, too.
10. **Do your best.** Like commandment #1, this should also cover just about everything. No one can ask you to do more.

It's important to decide early on how you will conduct yourself. Then, when a crisis erupts or challenge arises, you won't have to think twice about the right thing to do. I've always said that perfect practice makes perfect. These rules are no exception. And just for the record, these commandments work outside the office too.

***Mackay's Moral:** Some rules are made not to be broken.*

# Getting outside the box

By Harvey Mackay

One of the most frequently used phrases in business today is “thinking outside the box.” I admit it’s crossed my lips more than a few times. I like what it stands for: creative approaches to challenges.

What continues to baffle me, however, is how we got in that box in the first place, and why it is so hard to get out. It can get downright claustrophobic.

I’ve written volumes on creativity. I admire people who use their left brain effectively. I applaud risk-takers. I hire people who demonstrate an ability to tackle a problem without getting tackled first.

Stanford University researchers have reached a startling conclusion: what we use as conscious brain energy is as little as 6 percent of our overall brain capacity! That figure can rise to 17 percent when you factor in what occurs within the subconscious brain. Stanford offers this simplified explanation: The conscious brain is the processing center for new information, while the subconscious brain is responsible for memories, habits, emotions and creativity.

Okay, then, even a scientifically-challenged individual like me can figure out that to get the best out of your brain, you need to engage the subconscious and unconscious parts of your brain to really think outside the box.

Psychologist Jeff Magee says that most managers, and individuals in general, “never allow their minds the opportunity to succeed due to overweighing it with negative and pessimistic experiences and thoughts.”

So the solution should be simple: Stop thinking negative thoughts and have a more optimistic outlook on life. Oh, that it were so easy.

You have to train your brain to see a new side of situations. Get a box cutter and slice away one wall of the box at a time. If the box has six sides, try these six steps toward new ways of thinking.

1. **Eliminate the phrase “Because we’ve always done it that way” from your vocabulary and from your attitude.** Sometimes the tried and true way works best, and sometimes it’s just easier not to try something different. But I am willing to bet that just as often, a new approach could save time or money and improve results. At least try it! As my dear friend Curt Carlson, founder of Carlson Companies, used to say, “I’m not

distracted by how things are.” By the way, Curt built a multi-billion dollar marketing, travel, and hospitality empire with that kind of thinking.

2. **Seek the advice of the most efficient person you know.** Ask that person for advice, even if your project isn't in his or her particular area of expertise. Explain what outcome you are seeking, and work backwards. Efficiency is often translatable from one project to the next. And two heads are usually better than one.
3. **Consult with people at all levels of your organization.** Perhaps you may have heard the story about the famed El Cortez Hotel in San Diego, where the owners wanted to install an additional elevator, and decided that they would have to close the hotel to do the extensive renovation. Finally, a maintenance worker suggested that they build it on the outside of the building, where it wouldn't interfere with the floor plan inside, nor interrupt business as it was installed. Eureka!
4. **Read all about it.** Trade journals are a good place to start, but still pretty close to the box. Business magazines and websites are a terrific source of ideas, which may not necessarily pertain to your business, but which may be easily adapted. NASA scientists and engineers have drawn inspiration from early science fiction works – your next great idea may be as close as the next book you read.
5. **Embrace change.** Not just any change – the kind that makes things better. Don't be afraid of your ideas. The old-fashioned suggestion box yielded some amazingly simple yet practical ideas. Thinking outside the box is not about how much money you can spend, or how bizarre your plan must be. It's just finding a better way to do it, and then improving on that as necessary.
6. **Commit yourself to keeping an open mind.** With all the walls torn down, the box should be pretty easy to get out of. You'll feel like you got a “get out of jail free” card!

***Mackay's Moral:** Boxes are great for storing things. Just don't store your brain there.*

# Manage your time or others will do it for you

By Harvey Mackay

I'll never forget an important time management lesson I learned in a seminar many years ago . . . especially how the instructor illustrated the point.

"Okay, time for a quiz," he said, as he pulled out a one-gallon wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on the desk in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is the jar full?"

Everyone in the seminar said, "Yes."

Then he said, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar. This caused pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he asked the group again, "Is the jar full?"

By this time the class was onto him. "Probably not," we answered.

"Good!" he replied as he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?"

"No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you really try hard, you can always fit some things into it."

"No," the instructor replied. "The point is if you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

So, today, tonight, or in the morning when you are reflecting on this story, ask yourself: What are the 'big rocks' in my life or business? Then, be sure to put those in your jar first.

And by the way, you get the same size jar as everyone else. No exceptions.

What changes from person to person is the size of each rock. I've got a couple boulders in my jar: family first, always. Things like friends, my company, my speaking/writing "hobby," maintaining my network, my volunteer commitments, my health, and my religion all take up a lot of space. The gravel is all the stuff that takes up more than a few minutes but doesn't

necessarily happen every day, like a committee assignment, a vacation, learning new software ... you get the idea.

And now, the sand. You can decide whether to be that 98-pound weakling who gets sand kicked at him, or the creator of a spectacular sand castle. The sand is the yes/no stuff that absolutely has to fit around everything else after it's in the jar. A little piece of sand in your eye is a big pain, and those are the ones that get the no-thank-you right off the bat. A little sand on an icy street is one of life's little pleasures when you live in snow country as I do. You choose the sand. It's your jar.

In other words, it's your time. Change the rocks, gravel and sand into hours, minutes and seconds. Then decide what your priorities are and how much time you'll spend on them. If you don't, someone else will decide for you and you'll end up with a jar full of heavy, jagged, nasty shards that nobody could touch without getting stabbed by another rock. Do you really want to spend your time working on other people's priorities?

As Benjamin Franklin said, "If we take care of the minutes, the years will take care of themselves." Good time management is taking care of the things that matter most to us first and keeping that jar of rocks in sight all the time.

My friend Lou Holtz has a great formula: W.I.N. -- What's Important Now? Use some of your precious time to figure out what's important in your life and you *will* win.

***Mackay's Moral:*** *Hey, even Superman had to work around the Kryptonite. So can you.*

720 words

# Make a bad hire and your plans could backfire

By Harvey Mackay

If there is anything more scarce, more unique, more rare than ability . . . it's the ability to recognize ability.

Having said that and not contradicting myself, consider the following three situations:

- ❑ Let's say a man dates a woman for two years almost every day and every night. You would think they would know each other well. Let them marry each other and they will know more about each other in 60 days than they did in two years of dating.
- ❑ Two married couples can live side by side for 25 years. They are best friends. One day one of the couples calls the other couple. "Hey, we've got a good idea. Let's go to Europe together for six weeks. They may never speak again.
- ❑ You are interviewing a person for a software position at your company. You can interview them for six months and give them every test known to mankind. You would think that you would know the candidate well, but this is not necessarily true. Hire the person and you will know more in the first 30 days watching him or her on the firing line than you did the previous six months of interviews.

What I'm trying to say here is that it is extremely difficult to pick good people, but if you have a system and commit yourself to it, the chances will go up dramatically that you will be successful. You cannot build a business that has a revolving door.

When I got started in business at Mackay Envelope Corporation, I came up with an eight-point plan to insure the highest probability of success in hiring key employees. These concepts have worked very well for me, and we have continually led our industry in employee loyalty and longevity. Hopefully you may get one or two good ideas.

1. **Multiple interviews.** Have 6-8 interviews with a candidate and involve others in the interview process -- coworkers, friends and colleagues. The more people you have interview the candidate, the better.
2. **Full disclosure.** When a candidate becomes a finalist at our company, we allow them to talk to anybody on our payroll. We don't have a company point of view. Everyone can express themselves individually. We want the candidate to have 100 percent full disclosure of how any of our people feel. We have no hidden agenda, red flags or small print under the small print.

3. **Interview in different environments.** I want to check out candidates away from the office to see how they handle themselves in different social and casual circumstances. We might play golf, tennis, attend a concert or play, have breakfast, lunch or dinner. Believe me, you'll have a better feel, touch and pulse of that candidate.
4. **Interview candidate over telephone.** Today, everyone must be good on the telephone, which I believe can be a most awesome weapon. This is doubly important for the people who use the telephone for their jobs.
5. **Interview spouse and family.** A lot of people do not agree with me on this, but I feel spouses and family members need to realize we care about them, as well. Caring is contagious . . . help spread it around. We want candidates to know that when we make the decision to bring them on board, we consider it the single biggest decision Mackay Envelope Corporation can make. Remember, anyone can buy an envelope machine but it takes talent to hire the right person.
6. **Use industrial psychologists.** For hiring key employees, a valuable tool is using industrial psychologists. They don't make decisions for you; all they do is help you make the decision. But if you have some specific concerns, they can laser in on the problem.
7. **The Acid Test of Hiring.** Let's say I'm hiring a sales person. Approximately 10-15 minutes into the interview I ask myself, "How would I feel if this person were working for my competitor?" If I'm not worried, that's the end of the interview.
8. **Agreements prevent disagreements.** I strongly believe in written contracts. If you are willing to fight your guts out for an agreement, you won't have a disagreement.  
There is one overriding philosophy that you have to keep in mind for every person you hire. Never compromise your standards.

***Mackay's Moral:*** *The single greatest mistake a manager can make is to make a bad hire.*

# When 'go, team, go' becomes 'stop, team, stop'

By Harvey Mackay

When was the last time you were at a conference or seminar that didn't include at least one session on teambuilding? Did it include the old introduce-yourself-to-the-people-next-to-you-and-come-up-with-a-plan-to-save-the-imaginary-company? Or an elaborately staged cheerleading event? These are a couple exercises most companies have used to emphasize the fundamental importance of promoting teamwork within their corporate structure.

And while some of the activities designed to promote cooperation are downright hokey, the concept of being able to work with others is critical to the success of every business I know. What's even more important is the ability to work with different groups of people -- different teams for different projects.

Nothing kills teamwork faster than a bad attitude. Let me share some of the most common teamwork killers that I hear. It doesn't seem to matter what kind of business you're in, these themes are universal:

**I can't work with \_\_\_\_\_.** It's time to put personality issues aside and stay professional. Sure, there are people you really don't care to be around, but don't let them bring out the worst in you.

**It's my way or the highway.** Someone has to be in charge, but never confuse leadership with knowing it all. Your way may lead to the highway sooner than you'd like if you keep up this attitude.

**Why do I always get stuck babysitting the new people?** I'd take that as a compliment! Someone in charge thinks you're a good mentor and has recognized your talent at bringing along the recent hires. The suits don't usually let underachievers interfere with the care and feeding of their rising stars.

**I'm too busy.** The old saying about asking a busy person if you want something done is true. If you truly can't devote adequate time to a project because of your other demands, speak to your supervisor about priorities. You've probably been assigned to the new project because you're a good fit, not because you're being punished. (If the latter is the case, dust off your resume and start looking for a new team pronto.)

**This is a dumb project.** Do you really know all the details of this project and how your work will fit in the big picture? A clearly defined goal should be the starting point of any project. If it's not, you don't have the information you need to accomplish your mission. If you do have that information, but can't see where you fit in, see above note about dusting off resume.

**Are we just doing this to make the boss look good?** Well, maybe you are, but your boss is probably holding your next promotion or next raise in his/her hands. That should be some incentive! Besides, the boss's boss knows that the boss didn't do the job all alone; don't blow your chance to shine.

**Whose bright idea was this?** Does it really matter? If it's a good idea, be thankful that you have the opportunity to develop it. If it's a bad idea, that fact will show up soon enough. Don't make the mistake of dismissing any idea solely because of the source. I'm a firm believer that everybody's got a few good ideas floating around in the gray matter.

**Can't someone else do this?** Sure they can, and maybe even better than you. Are you that eager to give them the opportunity? Give it your best shot and show that not only are you a team player, you're the "go-to" guy or gal.

**I'll do it/You do it.** Either way, the team concept is missing. Some projects can succeed with just one person on the job, but two heads are better than one. Don't shun help just to make things "easier." It usually backfires.

**What happens if we fail?** Who said you were going to fail? Starting out with a negative attitude is your first and worst mistake. From my experience, most people don't plan to fail, they fail to plan. Better you should plan to succeed and keep your goal clearly in the center of your plans.

There is an idiom in Japanese, "to eat from the same pot." In any business, everyone eats from the same pot regardless of the job title: president, factory worker, switchboard operator, legal counsel, payroll clerk. If the pot disappears, everyone goes hungry. But when the pot is full, the fruits of labor are shared by all.

***Mackay's Moral:*** *If you want to "eat from the same pot," add to the stew.*